



Town Brook Restoration

River herring conservation Plymouth, Massachusetts

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is a federal trustee for migratory birds, endangered species and interjurisdictional fish. Our mission is to work with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

The continuing decline in the quantity and quality of aquatic and upland habitat in this country has prompted the Service to develop initiatives to restore riverine habitat, estuarine and freshwater wetlands, riparian zones, and other habitats to benefit plant and animal populations.

Town Brook in historic Plymouth, Mass., is a 1.5-mile small stream that originates in the 269-acre Billington Sea and flows into Plymouth Harbor.

Improved access to the Billington Sea could increase the current spawning run of about 150,000 river herring to about 1 million fish. Town Brook has a rich history of fisheries use by Native Americans, early European settlers and present day commercial and recreational interests.

Historically, as Plymouth was developed, Town Brook became a center of industrialization during which its water was used to power numerous mills and subsequently a variety of factories all of which resulted in poor water quality and restrictions to spawning areas.

Late in the 20th century, recognition of the importance of Town Brook and its fish resources prompted Plymouth to initiate efforts to restore the brook and associated riparian corridor.

Over the last 15 years, the partnership

Through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife and the National Fish Passage programs, the Service works with partners to restore fish passage and stream habitat for high priority migratory fish such as river herring (alewives and blueback herring) and American eels.

These voluntary programs provide technical assistance and funding to municipalities, private landowners, and non-governmental organizations throughout the northeastern U.S. to restore rivers and streams by removing barriers to upstream passage through dam removal, culvert replacement/retrofit, or the installation of fish passage structures.

has included federal and state environmental agencies, conservation organizations and many others. Since 2009, staff in the Partners for Fish and Wildlife and Fisheries programs have been part of a project technical team during the planning, design and permitting phases that resulted in the successful 2014 removal of the Off-Billington Street Dam.

The Service will continue its collaboration for the planned removal of the Plymco Dam later in 2014 and the proposed removal of the Holmes Dam in 2016. These dams are the fourth, fifth and last structures that partners have worked on in Town Brook in the last decade to restore riverine conditions and access to spawning habitat with the hope of restoring river herring populations that were present when the Pilgrims settled the area in the 17th century.

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Images of Off-Billington Street Dam on Town Brook. Top image is prior to removal. The bottom two images are following removal, during construction of the replacement bridge. All photos USFWS.

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